



State of Arizona
Department of Education

HNS# 018-13
USDA SP 26-13

MEMORANDUM

TO: Sponsors of the National School Lunch Program

FROM: Mary Szafranski, Deputy Associate Superintendent
Arizona Department of Education, Health and Nutrition Services

Cara Peczkowski, Director
Arizona Department of Education, School Nutrition Programs

DATE: March 15, 2013

SUBJECT: Extending Flexibility in the Meat/Meat Alternate and Grains Maximums for School Year 2013-14

Original Signed

Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) issued a policy memorandum, SP 11-2013 REVISED (the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) memorandum CN# 26-13), which gave state and local operators flexibility in meeting the weekly maximums for grains and meat/meat alternates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) for compliance purposes in school year (SY) 2012-13. The memorandum stated that ADE will consider any School Food Authority (SFA) compliant with the weekly ranges for these two components if all supporting documentation indicates the menu is compliant with the weekly *minimums*.

Since issuance of SP 11-2013 (CN# 26-13), school food service operators, state agencies, industry members and other stakeholders have asked FNS to issue clear guidance to assist them with planning and procurement for SY 2013-14. Therefore, this memorandum extends the flexibility in the weekly maximums for grains and meat/meat alternates through **SY 2013-14 for both breakfast and lunch**.

In addition, FNS understands the need for longer term guidance on this issue, and are currently considering options for addressing this flexibility beyond SY 2013-14. FNS continues to welcome input from a broad range of program stakeholders and interested parties regarding the impact of this flexibility.



IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCES DURING SY 2012-13

FNS received significant feedback from state agencies and SFAs requesting an extension of this flexibility for future years due to notable operational challenges in meeting the weekly maximums for the grains and meat/meat alternates components. The three primary challenges addressed to FNS are menu planning, product availability, and student acceptance.

Menu Planning

Since grains may be served in a variety of ways in school meals, SFA menu planners have had difficulty when considering different portion sizes for grains when offering only one or multiple meal choices on single or multiple serving lines each day. FNS encourages creativity at the local level to offer a variety of foods to students. Therefore, continuing flexibility in assessing compliance with the weekly maximums for grains and meat/meat alternates offers SFAs additional assistance in planning menus to accommodate schools with various meal options, serving lines and grade groups.

Product Availability

SFAs have continued to report that some popular grain and meat/meat alternate products are not widely available from suppliers in a useful range of serving sizes in order to stay within the weekly maximum requirements. FNS knows that continuous product reformulation is needed to help SFAs meet all the requirements associated with the new meal pattern, and recognizes that modification of some grain and meat/meat alternate products has been challenging. The Department of Agriculture (USDA) continues its own efforts to obtain USDA Foods in appropriate serving sizes, notably poultry.

Student Acceptability

Finally, FNS recognizes that school meals must be selected and ultimately consumed by students in order to achieve the goal of providing adequate nutrition to our nation's schoolchildren. SFAs have reported that the additional flexibility has enabled them to offer their students' favorite food items in moderate portion sizes during the week. For instance, schools have reported increased meal acceptance in grades K-5 when sandwiches were offered with 2 ounce/equivalences (oz/eq.) of bread every day to students. The ability of SFAs to make gradual changes to existing menus has facilitated the transition to full implementation of the new meal pattern.

IMPACT ON MEAL PATTERN COMPLIANCE

The weekly maximums for grains and meat/meat alternates were intended to help menu planners meet the weekly dietary specifications, specifically calories. However, as noted above, feedback from schools during this initial implementation period indicate that these component maximums prove to be more difficult for menu planners than anticipated. The flexibility offered in SY 2012-13, through memorandum CN# 26-13, has allowed schools to develop nutritious and appealing menus without compromising or deviating from the new meal pattern and the recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. In fact, SFAs have reported they have successfully modified their menus and have been certified by their state agencies.

Due to the recent release of the School Nutrition Dietary Assessment study (SNDA IV), FNS has more information regarding the content of school meals offered in recent years. In SY 2009-10, before the weekly maximums for grains and meat/meat alternates were in place, the average lunch offered in high schools contained 843 calories. The new meal pattern, 9-12 grade grouping, requires an average weekly calorie limit of 850 calories. This indicates that most high schools are able to plan menus with the same amount of calories as have historically been offered, without the need to restrict the grain and meat/meat alternates.

NEXT STEPS

To further facilitate the transition to more nutritious and appealing meals, FNS is extending the flexibility for both breakfast and lunch through SY 2013-14. ADE will consider SFAs meeting only the daily and weekly *minimums* for the grains and meat/meat alternates components compliant for certification and administrative reviews. SFAs must also continue to meet all the remaining food components regulations and dietary specifications. SFAs are reminded that the meal pattern has not changed, rather given flexibility on their menus' compliance. SFAs are encouraged to consider the weekly maximums for grains and meat/meat alternates as a goal to assist in offering balanced meals that meet the calorie, sodium, and saturated fat requirements.

Please contact your Child Nutrition Program Specialist at Arizona Department of Education (ADE) with questions concerning this guidance. Your specialist can be found on the CNPWeb home page once logged into Common Logon.

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